

This one's gonna sting...



BUGS

Written by John N. Druska

Juggling the baby, Wendy DROPS the flashlight. It clatters THROUGH the gaps in the stairs, clacking onto the ground, rolling along the uneven pavement.

It comes to rest, its LIGHT shining through thick cobwebs, resting upon the monster:

Spiny, slimy, drooling, the height of an adult Labrador retriever, but merely twelve inches wide. Covered in thick scales, six jagged, cocked legs control pulsing, eager claws. It's a GIANT FUCKING FLEA.

RON
Mother of God.

EMILY
That's a flea.

The flea heaves, almost coughing, putrid slobber dripping from its mandibles. Ron levels his shotgun at the freak again. Without taking his eyes off the flea:

RON
I'm going to need more shells.
Living room bureau. Right side
drawer. Go now.

Emily is FROZEN. The wasps were one thing, but almost too big and violent to register as real. This abomination is before her, sees her, can strike her down in a blink. She SHUTS DOWN.

RON (CONT'D)
EMILY! Shells, NOW!

Rocked from her waking nightmare, Emily obeys, running up the steps. It's just Ron and the flea now, inexplicable SILENCE between them. He clutches his gun tightly, the worn oak and iron squeaking against the leather of his weathered hands.

The flea MOVES! Ron FIRES! AND FIRES AGAIN! The MUZZLE BLASTS act almost as a strobe effect: each time he discharges the gun, the flea is in a new corner of the room, moving faster than the man's impulses, stalking him at light speed.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Emily rushes into the living room, pulling open drawers in the BUREAU, searching frantically. She hears the BLASTS from below.

EMILY
Shit! C'mon!!!

She YANKS drawers clean out, flinging their contents about the room. Finally, a partially-full BOX OF SHOTGUN SHELLS falls, its contents clattering against the hardwood floor.

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

BANG! One last hopeless blast from the smoking, searing shotgun barrel. Ron pops his spent shells out of the gun. Red hot, they fall around his boots like loose change. He's out.

SCREEE! The flea LEAPS and withdraws lighting quick, SLASHING Ron's left leg with a razorblade foreleg. Blood quickly soaks the denim on his thigh. He grunts in pain.

RON
Emily! RELOAD!

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

On her hands and knees, Emily finally scoops up two fistfuls of shells. She rises and runs out of the room.

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Stumbling, Ron inches back towards the staircase. His head on a swivel, trying to anticipate the ghoul's next move, Ron points his empty gun at nothing.

The flea steps in and out of the shafts of flashlight in a display of savage peacockery. It jukes forward and back, threatening another strike but not committing one. It is playing with Ron; gamesmanship from the unholy beast.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Emily rushes back through the kitchen but SLIPS on the spilt coffee. FALLING, she hits the sink cabinets hard, dropping the shells!

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Ron's feet unsteadily find the first step. He trudges slowly backwards, leaving bloody boot prints on each step. He blinks hard, cold sweat soaking his shirt; he's going into shock.

The flea matches his steps, watching the man slowly fade. Each peck of its gnarled legs mimicking the human locomotion it dissects with jittery, watery eye sacs.

SUDDENLY Ron turns and tries to RUSH up the steps! He loses his footing and falls, sitting halfway up the steps. Hoarse, quiet:

RON

Emily...

The flea lunges and BITES Ron's right leg, latching onto the ankle. He SCREAMS BLOODY MURDER.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Emily, disoriented from her fall, gathers a few shells - again - and scurries to the basement door on her hands and knees. She pokes her head around the corner and sees the atrocity below.

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Ron bashes the flea with his gun, finally shaking it off and kicking it back down a few steps. The shotgun barrel dangles open from the impacts. He holds out a quaking hand to Emily.

Drunk on adrenaline, Emily half-heartedly throws a handful of shells down to Ron. They bounce off his outstretched hand, or past him. Unknowingly, Emily nudges one LONE SHELL off the landing. It rolls and falls onto the first step. CLACK.

The flea backs away, shaking off the blows from Ron like a dog getting out of a pool.

CLICK. CLACK. The rogue BULLET rolls two more steps down.

Emily watches the flea "kneel," lowering its head to the floor and SLURPING up a puddle of Ron's BLOOD. Its appetite is whetted, and it's hungry for more. Don't ask how she knows. When you see it, you know.

CLICK. CLACK. The shotgun shell crawls down the stairs, its momentum dying a little bit more with each tumble of six inches.

RON

Emily. Get Wendy and Gwendoline and get them away from here. I'll hold him off as long as I can.

EMILY

Ron, no!

The flea pauses, watching them converse. CLICK.

RON

He's got me dead to rights. But
it's not their time yet. It's not
yours. You save my girls, Emily...
and I'll save you.

CLACK. The shotgun shell lands NEXT TO RON. He sees it for the first time. So does Emily. So does the flea. Emily makes disturbing, inter-species EYE CONTACT with the flea, which seems to be LEARNING as each moment goes by.

With quivering, blood-soaked fingers, Ron seizes the shell, raising it to his gun, nudging it into the open chamber. Emily poises herself on the stair landing.

The flea CROUCHES. They hear a sickening, audible SQUEEZING NOISE - the compression of the flea's elastic muscles coiling beneath its powerful legs.

Ron's weak arms tremble, struggling to lock his gun barrel back in place flush against the breach.

That SILENCE again. The purity of Nature itself seeping into this pre-built tomb. Life and death. The preservation of the next generation. The sacred, and the evil that stands in its way. The homo and the Siphonaptera feel the same thing.

SCREEE! Emily THROWS herself down the stairs! She lands HARD next to Ron, grabbing the underside of the barrel and HAULING it into place! CLICK! The flea JUMPS at them! She lifts the barrel!

BLITSCHHH! The gun barrel jams with a revolting CRUNCH into the OPEN MAW of the flea! It SQUEALS, STUCK on the gun, thrashing around on the end of the impaling cannon! Ron pulls the trigger!

BLAMMO!!!

The flea FLIES across the basement, SLAMMING into the far wall with a THUD! A rancid trail of thick, yellow sludge smears the earthen façade as the fractured, smoking remains slide down to the floor. It's DEAD.

Ron and Emily look at the carcass, overwhelmed for a minute, before relaxing. After a moment:

RON

WELCOME TO UTAH, YOU SON OF A
BITCH!!!

They LAUGH. Primal, victorious, joyful laughter. Emily reaches across to Ron's front shirt pocket and pulls out his FLASK, taking a long pull. From outside, muffled:

WENDY (O.S.)

Ron?!?!

Ron takes the flask back from Emily, having a sip in between gasps of triumphant breath.

RON

Yeah, we're okay, Wendy! We bagged this bastard! And his shit-eatin' grin! We bagged him good and God damn dead!!!

WENDY (O.S.)

Ron! Language!

EXT. WIGGINS FARMHOUSE - LATER

SCRACKKK! With a shovel, Emily pries the flea's exoskeleton BREAST PLATE apart, revealing a fetid, sticky chamber within.

Nearby, Ron sits on an Adirondack chair, cradling Gwendoline while Wendy dresses his leg wounds as best she can. Emily stands, incredulous, over the impromptu autopsy.

EMILY

It's completely organic.

WENDY

Smells organic.

RON

So that thing's not a robot? Or a drone or something?

Emily leans in closer to the splayed remains, noticing a half-dozen soft, PEARLY WHITE ORBS, each the size of a golf ball.

EMILY

Drones don't lay eggs.

(to Wendy)

You got lighter fluid and a match?

WENDY

Gladly.

Wendy walks back into the house. A paradoxical moment as Emily and Ron, beaten and bloodied, take in the scenic morning vista.

RON

You read the Bible, Agent Orison?

EMILY

I told you, I'm a scientist.

RON

Hm. Bible talks about the Four Horsemen. Harbingers of the Apocalypse. Famine - we got that here, losing more and more cattle we can't feed. Conquest...maybe that's them Agrico folks, coming in, taking everything away from us. Death, well...

They both look down to the twisted remains of the flea. Wendy returns with LIGHTER FLUID and a box of FIREPLACE MATCHES.

Emily takes the lighter fluid and sprays the flea carcass.

She withdraws a match, STRIKES IT, and drops it on the flea. A BLAZE IGNITES that quickly MELTS the eggs. They POP and squeal with the heat as the flea insides are liquefied, then crispened.

Emily is RATTLED as black smoke curls up from the frying enigma. TEARS well in her eyes. She looks to Ron pitifully.

EMILY

I don't know how to say this Ron...
You saved my life in there.

RON

I've put down a few ten pointers in my day. You held your own. You ever put down any ten-pointers?

EMILY

No. Been to a gun range once or twice. Took a self-defense class one afternoon. Y'know, what to do if a mugger comes at you with a knife...

She chuckles at her own lameness, but it dries her eyes. She looks away to the horizon:

EMILY'S P.O.V. - CONTINUOUS

On the horizon, a DUST CLOUD appears, coming down the private road towards the house. Soon the cloud reveals its cause: MILITARY HUMMERS, LARGE BLACK VANS, URBAN S.W.A.T. VEHICLES. It's another CONVOY rolling towards them.

BACK TO SCENE - CONTINUOUS

EMILY
Who's the fourth?

RON
Huh?

EMILY
The Fourth Horseman.

RON
War.

Through the grasses on their flanks step BLACK CLAD PARAMILITARY SOLDIERS. Weapons drawn, they advance swiftly and silently on the farmhouse. Emily, Ron and Wendy look to them peculiarly, though not necessarily alarmed.

PTEW! Emily is struck by a TRANQUILIZER DART! She staggers back one half step, before she collapses, fading into

BLACK.

EMILY'S P.O.V. - LATER

BLINDING BRIGHT LIGHT, coming from two SPOTLIGHTS above.

INT. METAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Groggy, Emily's squinting eyes adjust and reveal a tall, square, metallic room, one door on a far wall. She is HANDCUFFED to the TABLE that she sits at, in an unforgiving metal chair; other empty chairs surround the table.

From the shadows of one corner steps Richard. He's in a neatly pressed new shirt and tie, projecting the utmost confidence. He saunters towards Emily with slimy bravado and a percolating threat of violence oozing from his pores.

RICHARD
Remember me? I remember you. I've had some time to familiarize myself with you, Agent Orison.

He slaps a MANILA FOLDER on the table in front of her. She sees the corners of some DOCUMENTS poking out: it's her FEDERAL JACKET - her permanent record, if you will.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I figured if you got into a hard perimeter D.O.D. Tier 5 Field Exercise without clearance, you must be pretty V.I.P. Military Intel, PsyOps, maybe Exfil with the Rangers. Turns out you're just an egghead bureaucrat sticking your nose where it doesn't belong.

(a beat)

I want to know what you think you saw in that cornfield and who else you've made the mistake of telling about it.

Emily still gains her bearings, her mind slowly focusing. She squeezes her temples and eyes. After a moment, Emily's head clears. She zeroes in on Richard, matching his laser-focused antagonism.

EMILY

I saw you send a platoon of Rangers into a god damn ambush.

RICHARD

And I saw you turn tail like chicken shit the moment things went sideways.

EMILY

And I'm alive because of it. What did you do? Stay and fight every last one of them?

RICHARD

Y'know, the Rangers have a word for someone like you. Someone who plays like they're a team player, but sells out the squad at a moment's notice - to save their own ass, or to turn glory hog. A buddy fucker. In military parlance,

He leans into her, WHISPERING in a vile - almost sexual - taunt:

RICHARD (CONT'D)

- a Blue Falcon. You're a Blue Falcon. How does that feel?

Emily shudders as his hot, devilish breath cascades over her ear and neck. CHUNK! Scream. The METAL DOOR on the far wall slowly opens.

The click-clacking of shiny black dress shoes echoes off the cavernous walls. Richard obediently backs away from Emily.

MAJOR GENERAL WALTER COBURN, 55, a Roman profile, neatly trimmed salt & pepper goatee, balding hair combed back in a slick, walks towards Emily. He's tall, barrel-chested; TWO SILVER STARS embroidered on his crisp, uniformed shoulders.

Coburn UNLOCKS Emily's handcuffs, sitting opposite her.

COBURN

Major General Walter Coburn, U.S.
Army.

She quickly eyes Richard; he didn't introduce himself.

COBURN (CONT'D)

I've reviewed your jacket as well.
I'm quite impressed. Tell me about
eusocial wasps.

Richard rolls his eyes derisively. Emily is defensive, but slowly melts under Coburn's seemingly genuine charm.

EMILY

Everything one wasp does helps the
survival of the entire brood. The
workers tend to all the eggs, the
hunters find food for everybody.

COBURN

What about specific tasks? Can they
coordinate their efforts? Explain
to one another their intention?

EMILY

Sure. Wasps have famously been
observed swarming a larger
predator, vibrating their wings
microscopically. If 20 or 30 do it
all at once, the combined heat
cooks the invader to death.

COBURN

(impressed, dreamily)
Fascinating.

RICHARD

Can we get back to the issue at
hand?

EMILY

You mean the giant wasps that you
let escape from an underground Army
lab? Or the giant flea that almost
ate an infant today?

RICHARD

The flea whose eggs you torched for
no god damn reason? Yeah, let's
talk about that!

EMILY

You want more of those things
jumping around out there
uncontrolled?!

RICHARD

Those bugs aren't doing anything
but hanging out a half mile from
the base on land that we own for
fifty miles in any direction.

Something revelatory dawns on Emily.

EMILY

Agrico.

Richard seethes, embarrassed at having tipped his hand.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Holy shit. You're private sector.
What the hell is going on here?

COBURN

That will be all.